



# BETTER BRIDAL

Winter 2009

A business resource for the couture bridal industry

## modern art:

*CuttingEdge Interior Design is Transforming the Bridal Salon*

**Inside the Wedding Industry**  
*with Event Planner Marcy Blum*

**Alterations:**  
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Spring  
2009 SPRING MARKET REPORT

# modern art

How Cutting Edge Interior Design is Transforming the Bridal Salon

By: Kara Targonski

whiteCHICAGO

"If I could do it all again, I would be an architect," says Ursula Guyer, the co-owner of the bridal boutique whiteChicago. Guyer probably won't be giving up her successful career as bridal salon owner anytime soon, but her love and understanding of design is evident in every detail of her store. Guyer, like many of the other bridal salon owners who have emerged in the last few years, understands the crucial intersection where image, design and business meet to form one cohesive whole—the brand. Nothing can represent a brand more concretely than interior space. The interior design of a bridal salon tells a story, evokes a mood, and creates an experience. This is the goal of all interior design, but is crucial for store design and building a successful brand. Enter the modern bridal salon.

The owners of the modern bridal salon are younger, have solid backgrounds in business, fashion, and retailing, and are committed to selling glamorous gowns in an environment as compelling as the dresses they sell. While salons decorated with plush carpet, tufted stools, and the hushed calm associated with a women's private boudoir still exist, these modern bridal salons—carrying some of the most important designers in bridal couture—are moving in a completely different direction.

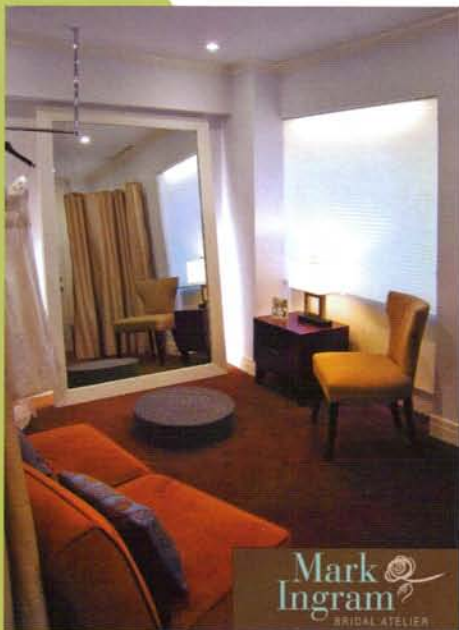
## Modern Art- The Wedding Dress

Camille Russler, the owner of Ever After- Miami opened her salon in 2002. "I was the first of the new guard," she says, referring to her 2400 square foot, sleek, and modern bridal salon. Built around the concept of an art gallery, Ever After isn't merely a place to buy a wedding dress—it's a showroom. Imagine a modern art gallery carrying sketches by Picasso, an abstract painting by de Kooning, a tongue in cheek portrait rendered by Andy Warhol—or a Lamborghini dealership. But instead of paintings or cars—Russler's store showcases dresses by some of the most important names in bridal couture—Angel Sanchez, Elie Saab, and Caroline Herrera. The dresses are tucked away in glass cases lit from below to make them glow and shine, like well-art. "The bridal gown is the art work" Russler says. "The showroom allows the client to be comfortable, to have a visual experience of the garment they are buying."



EVER AFTER

MIAMI



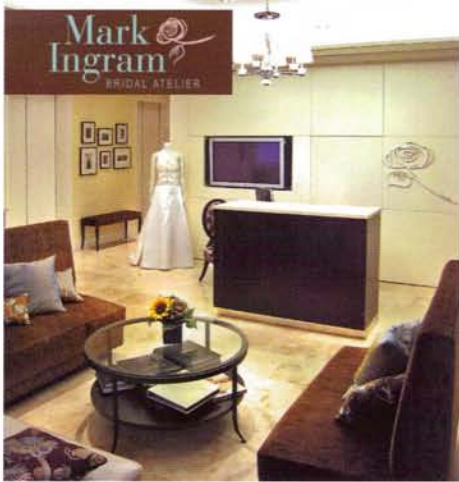
Mark  
Ingram  
BRIDAL ATELIER

Russler isn't the only bridal boutique owner to subscribe to the wedding-dress-as-art theory. Annette Cirillo-Bergenn co-owner of Couture Bride in Las Vegas and Ursula Guyer co-owner of the bridal consignment boutique whiteCHICAGO see the potential for bridal salons to display wedding gowns as priceless pieces of art. Cirillo-Bergenn describes walking into her salon—“It is as if you have entered a gallery of art. Each dress has a secret to tell, whether it be the lace, the floral detail, the nipped waist, the embellishment of embroidery.” As the exclusive Las Vegas retailer for high end couture designers Oscar de la Renta, Monique Lhuillier, Elizabeth Fillmore, Ulla Maija and Platinum Collection—the sample dresses become accessible modern art—swinging from Lucite bars on wooden hangers for the brides to admire, browse, and try on. For Cirillo-Bergenn, the dresses are art—but Couture Bride keeps the experience tactile and personal. “Couture Bride was designed

as a haven for the bride. The materials chosen for the salon were deliberate; very carefully thought out to project the feeling of luxury with a sense of accessibility.”

At whiteCHICAGO the concept of the art gallery is taken to another level, since the only dresses the store sells are those taken in on consignment. Guyer comments, “What is an art gallery? A consignment shop.” For Guyer it was important that her store didn't have the musty, cluttered, disorganized feel associated with resale. Using education gleaned from a stint in interior design school, Guyer designed the store to be modern, fresh, and clean. For her that meant white. Walls, furniture, floors, flowers and fixtures—all white. Guyer uses unexpected elements, like the soft scent of a burning candle and the texture provided by flowers, a white brick wall, and paper light fixtures hanging over the reception desk to offset the harder elements of the salon. Guyer credits the design of the store for attracting clients to whiteCHICAGO. “I think it tells people what we are about. The

modern



clients see the space and think 'they must have cool dresses in there'."

#### Send a Message

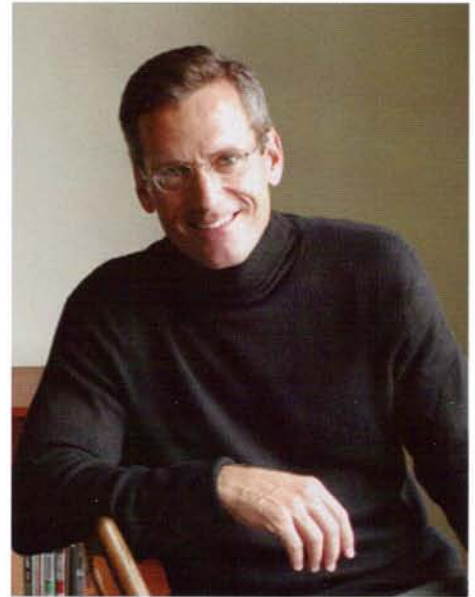
Cool is good. So are a bunch of other adjectives—elegant, modern, charming, exquisite, fresh, tailored, and clean. Each of these words describes a specific type of look, a certain kind of space, a particular style of designer, maybe even a certain type of customer. A compelling store design should be able to communicate this message to the client—this is the bridal salon's brand image. David Gauld, architect for Mark Ingram's New York salon, Bridal Atelier explains, "Everything a brand puts in front of an audience sends a message to that audience about its identity and values. The design need not be expensive but it should be carefully considered, clever, and even beautiful."

#### Create a Brand

The importance of properly representing a brand through store design is something the modern bridal salon owners understand and feel is a crucial aspect of their salon's success. Ursula Guyer says, "Branding is very important. Every decision I make,

I ask myself, is this going to be within the brand?" Each element—from the PVC plumbing pipe used to hang the dresses, to the Wi-Fi enabled lounge—was carefully considered to ensure it fit the brand image of "modern and elegant". At Ever After, Camille Russler sells "the modern fairy tale" and elegance, a touch of charm and impeccable service are needed to pull it off. "It's not only the look, but the experience of the store," she says. The Ever After experience includes head-toe personal styling for the wedding day, personal shopping, a fashion designer on staff and in-house alterations—the high end service completes and compliments the fashion forward look of the store. For Annette Cirillo-Bergenn at Couture Bride, the design of the interior spaces of the salon were key to providing the client with visual cues to identify the Couture Bride brand as warm and inviting—from the sparkly chocolate paint, to the circular fitting rooms, to the inspiring quotes painted on the walls—every element was chosen to create what Cirillo-Bergenn describes as "a little haven of refuge from the world for our brides".

Success for these three bridal salons has come through a clear articulation of their visions and brands through the interior design of their stores. They determined a look for their stores which would best represent the designers they carry and engage the brides who shop with them to create havens of calm, edgy fairy tales, and art galleries. These bridal salons aren't merely selling couture gowns, but instead, as Camille Russler and Ursula Geyer suggest, providing their clients with "a complete experience". And that experience begins as soon as the client walks through the door.



#### David Gauld's Top Six Store Design Tips

1. Hire a professional lighting designer to assist your Architect. Lighting enhances mood immeasurably and studies show that the right lighting will promote your business goals.
2. Use expensive materials sparingly but in the places where they will have the most impact, such as entrances and transaction counters.
3. Think of a time or place that has made you feel good, and try to recreate the essence of that environment.
4. Hire a Feng Shui practitioner to review your plans before they are finalized. This ancient Chinese study can offer surprisingly practical suggestions for the organization and design of the space.
5. Use design to create initial excitement to bring people into the store, but then use design to calm them down so they can think about their purchases. If it is all excitement, they won't be able to focus, and will leave without buying.
6. Beware of design trends. What looks hip today might look very dated in no time. It is better to find a design that emerges naturally from the essence of the product or brand, the building or environment, and the time and place.

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